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John Winn House (Belmont)
759 Belmont Avenue
Charlottesville
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1247

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN WINN HOUSE (Belmont)

HABS No. VA-1247

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Location: 759 Belmont Avenue, Charlottesville, Albemarle County, Virginia

Present Owner: Ted Oakey, Stedman House Antiques, 201 E. High Street, Charlottesville, Virginia, 22901

Present Occupants: Jamie Karn, Rabia Collins, Thomas Gilreath, Susan Love, Richard Ingham, Trudy Neofotis

Present Use: apartment complex

Significance: This house, once part of a 551 acre estate, is believed to have been built for John Winn by John Jordan, a brick mason for Thomas Jefferson. It is similar to other buildings built by Jordan, such as Stono, in Lexington, Virginia. With its center pavilion with lower symmetrical side wings, the Winn House illustrates Jefferson's influence on Jordan. The details of the house are of the Greek Revival and Federal periods as it was built during the transition between the two.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. General History:

1. Date of construction: circa 1820
2. Architect: It is believed that John Jordan, brick mason for Thomas Jefferson and brother-in-law to John Winn, built the Winn house. There are great similarities between the Winn house and Stono and Little Stono (both of Lexington, Virginia) and Belle Mont (in northwest Alabama), all built by Jordan.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title for the land on which the building stands. Reference is to the Clerk's Office of Albemarle County, Virginia.

John Winn is believed to have purchased the land on which this stately mansion stands from Charles Lewis Bankhead and John Carr (see deeds vol. 23, page 118 [15 August 1820] and 19 November 1816, vol. 20, page 240).

1837 - Will written 4 June 1834, probated 4 December 1837, recorded in volume 13, page 6. A 539-acre estate called Belle Mont to be auctioned and sold to the highest bidder.

1847 - Deed 15 November 1847 in volume 45, page 368, to Slaughter A. Ficklin at auction.

1886 - Will written 10 April 1874, probated 1 February 1886, recorded in volume 29, page 521. Slaughter N. Ficklin designated William J. Ficklin as trustee for his "afflicted" wife Caroline Ficklin.

1890 - Deed 17 April 1890 in volume 96, page 62 (reference also made to this deed in volume 108, page 154). W.J. Ficklin sold the 551 acre Ficklin estate to A.D. Payne, Bartlett Bolling, F.A. Massie, and Frank Farish. They sold 3/7 undivided interest in their purchase to O.H. Harman, M. Levy, W.J. Ficklin, and Jefferson. They in turn sold the land to the Belmont Land Co., Corporation. Belmont Land Co. subdivided it and laid it off into 300 lots. Before the original purchase of April 1890 was paid for, the Belmont Land Co. sold its property to the Charlottesville Land Co.

1892 - Deed 10 October 1892, volume 98, page 168. William J. Ficklin (trustee for Mrs. Caroline Ficklin) buys the Belmont Mansion (block 12) from the Charlottesville Land Co.

1897 - Deed 29 June 1897, volume 133, page 164, William J. Ficklin's executors sell the mansion to Kate H. Farish.

unknown

1913 - Deed 18 February 1913, volume 151, page 445. H.E. Johnson conveyed the land to P.T. Cowles.

1915 - Deed 22 November 1915, volume 161, page 176. P.T. Cowles conveyed the land to E.G. Haden.

The remainder of the chain of title is unknown. According to a chain of title by the Landmark Commission, Department of Community Development for a landmark survey of Charlottesville, there were two owners (see deed book volume 28, page 387, and volume 34, page 360) before W.B. Nicholas acquired it in 1915 (deed book volume 35-492). It is known that George Seiler purchased it in 1940 and later sold it to the present owner, Ted Oakey.

4. Original plans and construction: The original building consisted of a two-story central pavilion with one-story side wings. A double height porch extended off the front of the central pavilion and a balcony was hung off the second floor. A large 16-foot arch which was found in the basement is believed to have been a part of the main room in the central pavilion. A medallion is also thought to have been

on the ceiling in the center of the main room because of the scars that have been found. The floor joists in the basement also suggest that stairs were located at the end of the main room, to the left of the hallway. The kitchen was originally located in the cellar. The central pavilion extended beyond the wings.

5. Alterations and additions: The upper story of the two wings is believed to have been added circa 1840. This is made evident by the change in the brick coursing and by the presence of the cornice molding on the center pavilion in the attic.

The 1920 Sanborn map shows a wood frame addition having been added to the left wing and a porch to the rear. The map, revised in 1929, shows that this addition to the rear was demolished and that the present addition had been built. Through the building's history, wood frame structures were added onto the house and then removed, including a large addition on the back of the central bay which is said to have extended across the present street. A brick addition was built on the south facade after 1940. One of the cellar windows on the westerly wing of this facade was originally a door.

Patched brick work on the east elevation indicates that there were once two doors here. One door would have led to the cellar and one into the first floor.

- B. Historical Context: John Winn, believed to be the first owner of the Belmont Mansion, originally came from Fluvanna and settled in Charlottesville in the early 1800s.¹ He was a successful merchant in the town and served as postmaster from November 17, 1803 to December 5, 1837.² He also dealt in real estate. John Winn owned, and probably built, the new Jefferson Hotel on Curt Square in 1828.³

In 1813, Winn purchased Belmont from John Carr where he lived until his death in 1837.⁴ Winn's sister, Lucy, was the wife of John Jordan, the believed architect of Belmont.⁵ The relationship between the two men is strong evidence for the argument of Jordan as builder of Belmont.

At the time of his death, John Winn's estate was valued at \$14,295.01, not including his land holdings. In the second codicil to this will, he gave his executors the power to erect from funds of his estate a grist and plater mill upon the part of his estate along Moore's Creek. He had been considering erecting this mill himself for some time.⁶

Slaughter W. Ficklin initially worked with his father in the tobacco business, which the latter had started in 1832 in Charlottesville. Slaughter then went into the stage business with William P. Farish. He was industrious and by 1857 he was able to purchase "Belle-Mont" (to be spelled Belmont after the Civil War). After the Civil War he turned the property into a stock farm. Imported Percheron-Norman horses were brought to Belmont. Soon after, the Belmont stock, and the farm itself, were known throughout the country. Prizes were won by Belmont stock and at one time a yearly catalogue of Belmont stock was issued.⁷

During the war, Ficklin served in the Confederate Army and was held prisoner for a time. Ficklin had a wife, Caroline, and one son, William J. Ficklin. He wife lost her mind but "rather than place her in an institution, he hired a nurse or an attendant to stay with her at times in her room."⁸ In his will provisions were made for the care and proper support of his "afflicted wife (whose insanity [Ficklin] consider[ed] beyond the hope of cure."⁹

At the death of his father, William became the executor-trustee of the estate. Under these titles he was to care for his mother and continued to reside on the Belmont estate.¹⁰

According to deed book 108, pages 154-155, "a certain portion of land known as Belmont adjacent to the city of Charlottesville" was sold to the Belmont Land Company in April of 1890. The land was laid off into 300 lots by the Belmont Land Company. (See map on data page 13.) These lots were recorded in the deed book 96 - dated August 7, 1891, page 62. Soon after, Lot 12, containing the Belmont Mansion, was bought back by William J. Ficklin and his mother. The house remained in the family until 1906 when it was acquired at auction by Kate Farish.¹¹

Endnotes

¹History of Albemarle County (files of K.E. Lay), pp. 346-347.

²Vera V. Via, Charlottesville Daily Progress, 1956 (files of Albemarle County Historical Society and K.E. Lay).

³Via.

⁴Will Book, Albemarle County Clerk's Office, Book 13, page 6.

⁵K. Edward Lay, unpublished manuscript, 1986, p. 16.

⁶Will Book 13.

⁷History of Albemarle County, pp. 192-193.

⁸Via.

⁹Will Book 29, p. 521.

¹⁰Deed Book, Albemarle County Clerk's Office, Book 88.

¹¹Charlottesville Landmark Survey, Department of Community Development, 759 Belmont Avenue.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Winn House, usually referred to as Belmont or the Ficklin Mansion, is located just south of Charlottesville near Moore's Creek. The property originally extended to the C and O railroad depot near downtown. The original brick structure, built around 1820, is composed of a two-story central bay with stylized Greek Revival columns and pediment and symmetrical one story wings. The original structure was built during the transition between the Federal period and the Greek Revival, as is evidenced in the many molding details both inside and outside.

Through his association with Thomas Jefferson, mason John Jordan was involved in the development of what has been called the "Temple plan" or the "Palladian Classical" or "Jeffersonian" style. Similar buildings that Jordan helped build are Stono (1818), and Little Stono (1816). Others in the general area that are also similar but constructed by different builders are the Semple House (1780, Williamsburg), Oak Lawn (1822, Cherry Avenue, Charlottesville), River Bluff (undated, Nelson County), Mountain Grove (undated, Albemarle County), and Belle Mont (undated, Alabama).

The temple plan is characterized by a two-story central pavilion with a full height portico and flanking one-story wings. These buildings were usually constructed of brick (Flemish bond) with tin gable roofs and wood detailing. The style is believed to have originated with the Semple House, possibly designed by Jefferson.¹ Jefferson himself sketched the prototype for the tripartite plan. Precedents have been traced to William Morris' Selected Architecture (1757).

Temple-style plans were composed according to proportional geometry, primarily of the square and the golden rectangle.

Their orders and interior decorations were taken from current pattern books, such as those of Asher Benjamin and William Halfpenny.

Belmont was similarly designed, both the original plan (1820) and the later addition (1840) of the upper stories to the wings. The plan is composed of three squares, the central one projecting slightly and ending in a large portico.² (The actual configuration of the room of this bay was lost during renovation but a conjectural plan can be formulated based on the location of the staircase and the rafters.) The original elevation was a double square overall with an upright "golden section" in the center (the column front forming a square), and the wings as recumbant golden rectangles. The first floor windows were double circles. The roof is in the angle of the golden rectangle. The later addition continues the composition. The new height of the wings makes a square, until the mid-line at the top of the first floor windows. From ground to chimney they form upright golden rectangles. The pitch of the roof is 22.5, half the square's angle (45 degrees).

The wooden detailing of the Winn House is blocky and coarse, dating from the early transition to the Greek Revival period. The wing rooms on the first floor are noticeably more delicate, dating from the later Federal period. (There are Greek colonettes on the mantels, however.) Details throughout the house were taken directly or derived from Asher Benjamin's books. For instance, the entrance fanlight is shown in Benjamin's first book (1805). The use of half-rounds as rustic flutes is shown in Benjamin's books as early as 1806, though he did not publish Greek Revival molding patterns until 1832. Some of these are remarkably similar to those found at the Winn House, although the dates do not seem to fit. It has not yet been determined how builders such as John Jordan developed this style.

2. Condition of fabric: The exterior brick walls are showing signs of deterioration and buckling. The interior has had partition walls added which divide each of the bays into an apartment with multiple rooms. Most of the decorative moldings are intact and the wood floors are in good condition. Even though the fireplaces have been blocked in, the mantels are still in place. The roof has been shingled and the structure is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The three bays are nearly equal in width with the center extending into the porch. On the interior,

the base dimensions vary by one inch; on the exterior, the west bay measures 21'1", the east bay measures 20'8". The other bay measures 23' for an overall width of 65'. The wings are 22'6" deep.

2. Foundation: The structure rises out of a brick foundation 1'6" thick of Flemish bond. There is a water table on the original structure which steps back in courses.
3. Walls: The brick walls are Flemish bond on the central bay and on the lower portion of the wings. The second story addition on the sides of the wings is randomly coursed American bond. The entire building, excluding the 1940s addition, is whitewashed. False jack arches have been plastered on the first floor window lintels. On the north elevation, the structure is seven bays wide with six original windows and a door in the center bay. The second and fourth bays now have doors and only patch marks are left to show that windows once were there. The central bay is marked by pilasters which finish the porch.

The south facade is obscured by the addition made in the 1940s. The flat arches have not been plastered as they were on the facade.

4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing walls support wood-framed floor and ceiling joists. The joists were pit sawn. The roof system is constructed of tapered wood rafters which join together in a ridge beam. On the wings, the beams were numbered with Roman numerals to aid the builder in construction. The random-spaced hardwood floors have been placed directly upon the beams without subfloors.
5. Porches and balconies:
 - a. Porches: The porch on the north facade is a double-height portico with square tapered Greek Revival columns that support the central pavilion.
 - b. Balcony: A balcony hangs over the portal, suspended from the attic by iron rods. This is similar to Jefferson's balconies on the University of Virginia's lawn pavilions. Both rods may be seen in the attic. Chinese-motif railings surround the balcony.
6. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys stand at the east and west ends of the house and were extended when the second floor was added to the wings. Extending above the firewalls, the interior side chimneys run flush with the exterior walls.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is located on the north facade in the central bay. The door has a fan window (transom) above it. Surrounding the entire door is a Federal, shouldered architrave crowned with a shallow wooden triangular pediment. The present glass paned door is not original; it matches that of the back addition. The balcony door jam has Greek revival moldings with rondelles in the corners, almost definitely from Asher Benjamin. The door is not original; it matches the others already mentioned.

An interior entrance found on Apartment 5 has a six-panel wood door that shows signs of weathering, and may have formerly been an exterior door.

- b. Windows: The ten cellar windows each have six panes, separated by 3/4" muntins. Extant original windows on the first floor are found in the first, third, fifth, and seventh bays. These nine-over-nine double-hung sash windows are surrounded by moldings of the Federal period. The sill projection is rounded and extends 2" from the brick in all but the wing windows. Wooden pegs are found on the joints of these window frames. In the wing windows of the north facade are simple block frames with rectangular sills one course high.

On the second floor, wing windows are six-over-six double-hung sash with identical Federal molding architrave trim and board sills. In the central bay the windows are nine-over-six double-hung sash.

No extant openings are located on either the east or west elevations. No shutters remain on the structure but remnants of the pins are in the brick work near the windows and doors. All the windows are scarred from hinges.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gabled roof on the central portion runs north-south, while the gabled roofs of the wings run east-west. The wood frame is covered with a metal roof, through a small roof in the pediment below the thermal window is shingled with 1" slats.
- b. Cornice: The wooden cornice is boxed on the central pavilion. The frieze and architrave moldings sit on the capitals of the columns on the center bay,

continuing over the north and south facades of the wings.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Stairways: The original stairway has been down and a central hall with stairs has been added with the 1940s addition to the south facade. Framing for the stairs has been found in the cellar ceiling (see plans of the cellar). The stairs are believed to have been originally sited just beyond the central hall, behind an arched opening. Similar staircases have appeared at Stono and the Willson-Walker House, both in Lexington, Virginia.
2. Cellar: The reflected beam plan in the cellar shows joist configurations allowing for a set of stairs to come through them. Further, the cellar walls below the framing reveal a landing, finished plaster wall, and pencilling along the eastern wall of the central room. There are two fireplaces in the cellar, one at each end. The door into the east wing is framed but the west wall has been broken through, forming an entry into the west wing.
3. Floors: All floors in the Winn house, except for the brick cellar one, are made of random hardwood boards. In the central pavilion, the boards run north-south with an average of eight boards to every three feet, one inch. Floorings in the wings run east-west with the random boards averaging eight boards to every three feet. On the first floor, in the central bay, the wood has been recently painted. The remainder of the wood floors have a natural finish.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Cellar - The cellar walls are unfinished with evidence of whitewashing remaining on the brick. At only one location is plaster found on the cellar walls - just below where the framing of the floor joist changes. The beams are exposed on the ceiling and large pegs, which were possibly used for drying foods, are found projecting from them.

Upper floors - All the walls above the cellar are plastered above baseboards. The first floor rooms all have chair rails or evidence of them as well as crown moldings. The wings have Federal trim, while the center moldings are symmetrical Greek Revival. The door and window frames have symmetrically molded trim in the shape of a fluted column, with corner blocks. The chair rail also uses the fluted columns motif. The crown moldings and baseboards are asymmetrical. The crown molding in the central bay, which measures seven and three-quarters inches in height and is nearly as deep, is the most ornate molding in the house, and thus signifies the

importance of the room. Also found in the center bay is a large mark left by a removed ceiling medallion. The medallion was located in the center of the room on axis with the door.

The plastered walls in the east wing show scar marks over the mantel, possibly from an overmantel. At the corner of the chimneys in both wings is a corner bead running from the cornice molding to the chair rail.

Moldings found in the upper story are simple and asymmetrical. The wings feature only baseboards but the central bay features an extant chair rail as well as the baseboards. The central bay of the second floor has Greek Revival trim only on the exterior of its door.

The plaster ceiling of the second floor has been dropped in the existing stairwell. Through some of the chipped white paint of the plaster walls, older coats of paint have been revealed. A yellow color is seen in the east wing and a blue tone is found in the second floor central area. A sample of wallpaper was found in the attic, still attached to the proper wall in what would have been the back portion of the central pavilion.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The only two interior doors that are definitely original are the ones separating the wing bays from the central bay. These six-paneled doors are trimmed with Greek Revival frames. On the wing side the doors are large panels, also framed with Greek Revival moldings. The panels contain ovals on the central bay side and rectangles on the wing side.
- b. Windows: The windows found in the central bay on both floors are set back in the wall. The other typical windows are set back at ninety degree angles. The muntins are deep, and date from the Federal period.

6. Decorative features and trim: The most notable piece of woodwork in the Winn House is the sixteen foot arch, now found in the cellar. The keystone is similar to one found in an Asher Benjamin book, The Practical House Carpenter (1832). The Greek Revival symmetrical trim of the arch is also similar to that of the doors in the central pavilion. The arch was probably a feature of the central bay, dividing the stair from the central entry hall.

The mantels found in the wings are Greek Revival wood

colonettes supporting plain friezes and simple mantel shelves. Evidence of a shift in the mantel in the east wing is seen in the hearth tiles which are not centered under the mantel.

7. Hardware: Very little original hardware is left. A few scattered remnants of shutter hinges are found on the outside of the structure. Square nails are also seen throughout the building. No locks or hinges are present but the scars of box locks are found in a door in the west upstairs wing (now the kitchen door) and in the front bedroom door of the upstairs east wing.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The Winn House's original facade is on the northern side. This side is currently used as the back entrance and is partially blocked from the road (Hinton Avenue) by the Hinton Avenue Baptist Church. The once large front yard, now smaller, serves as a back yard. Several large trees surround the building - mostly on the south side. According to several deeds, the estate was at one time as much as 551 acres, extending to the C & O railroad depot.
2. Historic landscape design: As can be seen in the Belmont Land Company plot map of 1891, the Winn House had a large front lawn surrounded by a horseshoe of trees.
3. Outbuildings: Although the Winn House was once part of a large estate, only the mansion remains standing. By 1929 two slave quarters were still extant on the rear of the site. During the subdivision of the land, however, they were demolished.

Endnotes

¹K. Edward Lay, Interview, 26 February, 1987.

²The actual interior measurements are very close to being square. The exterior is somewhat off, one wing measuring 20'8," the other 21'1." We were not able to determine exactly how these deviations were overcome.

PART IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was done under the direction of K. Edward Lay, professor of
architecture, University of Virginia as a class exercise during 1986 and
1987. The documentation was prepared by Sandy Fitzpatrick, Nancy Harrington,
and Rosalyn Keesee. The project was transmitted to the Library of Congress in
January, 1988.

